

Town of Los Gatos



Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines

Adopted by Council

January 2004



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Foreword

Things to Consider Before you Begin the Design Process

- The goal of the Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines (HDS&G) is to achieve design excellence, foster sustainable development and preserve the natural environment consistent with the Town's vision for its hillsides.
- Become familiar with the HDS&G, the Town's General Plan, Zoning Ordinance, Hillside Specific Plan, and other relevant plans and regulations. An application that is consistent with Town plans and policies, and has submitted all necessary reports and information can be processed with minimal delay.
- The HDS&G establish a framework for appropriate design, standards and minimum and/or maximum requirements. However, stricter standards may be required to avoid potential impacts and to achieve the goals and objectives of the HDS&G.¹
- Applicants are encouraged to creatively meet the goals and objectives of the HDS&G.
- The illustrations provided in the HDS&G are schematic and meant to show the intent of a standard or guideline.
- Not every site can be developed at the maximum density or intensity allowed by the Zoning Ordinance. Some sites cannot accommodate a two-story home or accessory uses such as swimming pools, tennis courts, etc.
- It is beneficial to inventory the site's natural, physical properties (such as slope distribution and geology). A site plan and design program should be developed only after the Least Restrictive Development Area (LRDA) has been identified based on a site specific constraints analysis. This approach will assist in designing projects that avoid or fit in with the site's natural constraints.
- It makes for good relations with your future neighbors if you meet with them beforehand to discuss any special concerns they may have prior to siting and designing the house, landscaping, or making any significant site improvements.
- Since the Town's goals, policies, and regulations may change from time to time, it is advisable to check with the Town's Community Development Department for any changes.

¹Designs that are bulky and massive may be more difficult to get approved (see Chapter V. section F. on pages 37-39).



I. INTRODUCTION

A. Vision Statement

The Town of Los Gatos is a beautiful and special place nestled at the base of the Santa Cruz Mountains. The mountains provide an exceptional backdrop, providing the Town with a beautiful, natural environment. It is the vision of Los Gatos that this natural asset be preserved by insuring that any development in hillside areas:

- maintains the existing open, wooded, rural character;
- is in harmony with the natural setting;
- conserves landforms and other features of the natural landscape;
- preserves wildlife habitat and movement corridors; and
- protects and preserves viewsheds and the ridgelines of the mountains.

B. Overview

The Hillside Development Standards & Guidelines (HDS&G) are intended to acknowledge that:

- The rural, natural open space character of the hillsides is an important component of the Town's character and charm.
- The hillsides are geologically and environmentally sensitive areas.
- Development in the hillsides has the potential to affect, and be effected by, the environment. Awareness of a site's natural constraints will result in development that is sensitive to the environment, incorporates safeguards to maximize public safety, and minimize changes to the visual quality of the hillsides.

Property owners should have the opportunity to build, expand, or remodel. However, such changes must recognize and respect the constraints associated with hillside development.

C. Goal

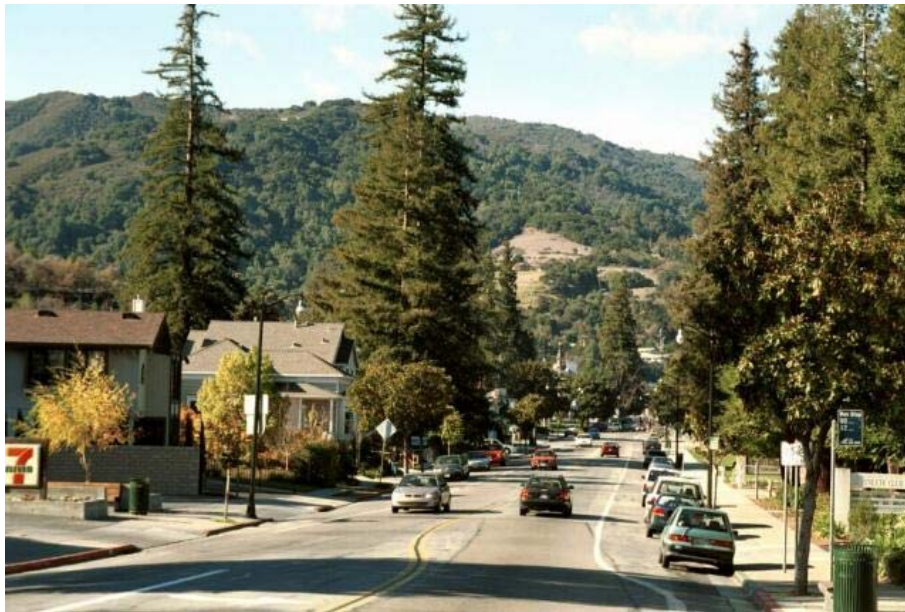
The overall goal of the Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines is to work hand in hand with the Town's discretionary development review process to achieve design excellence that fosters sustainable development and preserves the natural environment.



D. Applicability and Approval Process

The Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines apply to the areas shown on the Hillside Area Map. The map includes all areas with HR (Hillside Residential) and RC (Resource Conservation) zoning, and some lots with R-1 (Residential, Single-Family) zoning. The R-1 lots are included because of the presence of a hillside environment and/or steep slopes.

The Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines provide guidance to homeowners, builders and design professionals in preparing proposals for hillside areas. They also serve as a guide for the Town Council, Planning Commission, Development Review Committee, and Town staff during the review and approval process.



E. Main Street looking west



(Hillside Area Map)



E. Objectives of the Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines

The following objectives are intended to implement the Town of Los Gatos' vision statement for its hillside and to ensure that all development is in compliance with the goals, policies, and implementing strategies of the General Plan.

1. Ensure high quality projects.
2. Ensure that projects are designed to fit with and avoid the site constraints.
3. Minimize the potential for geologic failures, fires, and floods that result from or adversely impact new development.
4. Maintain the natural appearance of the hillsides from all vantage points including the valley floor.
5. Protect ridgelines from development.
6. Maximize contiguous natural open space.
7. Maintain the rural, natural, open space character of the hillsides.
8. Promote residents enjoyment of the hillsides, including the creation of hillside hiking/biking trails.
9. Ensure that development does not dominate, but rather visually blends and achieves harmony between the natural and built environment.
10. Conserve the natural features of the site such as topography, natural drainage, vegetation, wildlife habitats, movement corridors and other physical features.
11. Promote sustainability.
12. Incorporate the above objectives in a development's overall site plan



Photo by Deborah Ellis



F. Standards versus Guidelines

The Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines contain both standards and guidelines. Standards are mandatory nondiscretionary regulations that must be followed. The words “shall” or “prohibited” denotes a standard or mandatory regulation. Guidelines are discretionary. They are statements that present good ideas or recommendations on how to achieve the objectives established by these Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines. The word “should” denotes a guideline. If a statement does not include the words “shall” or “prohibited” it is a guideline.

Development plans must demonstrate full compliance with all standards, and substantial compliance with all applicable guidelines whenever site conditions require and there is not a substantial reason why the guideline should not be followed. The degree to which a guideline is addressed and the method used to comply is flexible. If an applicant believes a standard or guideline does not apply to their project the burden is on the applicant to demonstrate why and to suggest or provide a creative solution that still meets the intent of the goal and objectives of the HDS&G.

Site characteristics and constraints along with the implementation of the Hillside Standards & Guidelines may not allow a specific site to achieve the maximum density or intensity otherwise permitted by the Zoning Ordinance.

When a conflict arises between the implementation of two standards or two guidelines, a design solution will be sought that balances the objectives of the two standards or guidelines. However, when a conflict arises between a standard and a guideline the standard shall take precedence.

G. Relationship of the Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines to the Town’s General Plan, Zoning Ordinance and Los Gatos Hillside Specific Plan

The Hillside Development Standards & Guidelines are used along with other policy plans and regulatory documents adopted by the Town. These include the General Plan, Zoning Ordinance, Blossom Hill Comprehensive Open Space Study and Hillside Specific Plan. It is important that anyone intending to build or grade in the Town’s hillside area become familiar with these documents.

The Los Gatos General Plan contains many important goals and policies that are designed to preserve the natural character of the Town’s hillside areas. All projects must be consistent with the goals and policies of the General Plan.

The Los Gatos Zoning Ordinance establishes allowable land uses for all properties, regulates the intensity of development, and establishes the density of new subdivisions.

The Hillside Specific Plan addresses hillside development through its expression of two main goals: (1) preserve the irreplaceable natural environment of the mountains, and (2) address the



differences in development policies, regulations, and standards between the Town and County and to study possible new standards that could be adopted by the County.

H. Project Review and Approval Process.

The Town's process for reviewing and approving development projects in the hillside areas is discussed in Chapter IX.

